

## VOLVO RACING CAN BUILD A BUSINESS

by Gary Eisler

He saw it coming but couldn't stop it. A Toyota cut him off and when he slid out, Robert Gordon's racing Volvo came out in the rear. All he could do was hold on as he spun around and around, tires screeching and smoking, getting hit again in the front, until his black 142E came to a dead stop. He was turned fully around at Portland International Raceway, now facing the lineup of BMWs, Alfas and VW Rabbits roaring down the track straight at him.

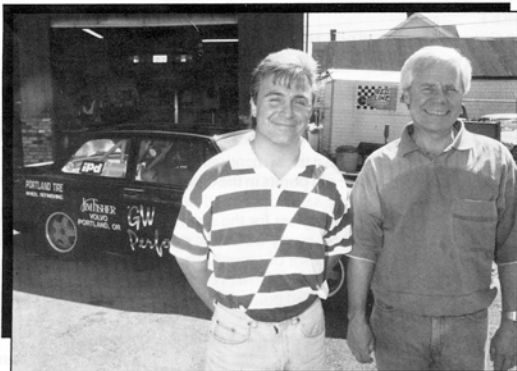
Gordon took a quick look at himself, saw that he and his car were in one piece, revved the engine and dashed back into the race traffic. When he hit the corners his rear tires rubbed against the corner panel and smoked. He knew that it'd blow if he had much farther to go. But he still managed to come in second place, only 4 seconds behind the leader, after being as much as 26 seconds behind.

That is the only race he has managed not to win in his 22 year-old car with 300,000 miles. "Winning four out of five isn't bad," Gordon says modestly, especially for a car he has just put onto the racing circuit. His Volvo set lap records and was fastest in class at both Portland International Raceway (PIR) in Portland, OR and Seattle International Raceway.

Robert Gordon, proprietor of GW Performance in Portland, a Volvo service and engine building business, began his whumping of the competition at the Rose Cup Races in Portland in the 1993 racing season when his black Volvo not only

won the Improved Touring competition in classes A, B, and C but also set a track record ITB class. Since then, it has been victory after victory, until the accident at PIR.

"The main competition are the BMW 20028, the Alfa Romeo GTVs and VW Rabbits," Gordon said. These racing classes are for cars no newer than 1975—new enough that they are not yet collectable and there are plenty of them around, yet old enough that they are relatively inexpensive to buy and race, Gordon said.



Gordon's 142E has been completely rebuilt — the only things left intact are the doors and the glass. The interior, gauges, engine and suspension are all redone. He has even painted the bottom side of the car.

He has bumped the engine from 130 hp to 160 hp through blueprinting and dynamometer time. "A lot of it has to do with reducing friction," he commented. One advantage to racing Volvos is that in 1971 the car came stock with 10.5 to one compression, which gives it a boost of five to 15 hp over competitors. ITB racers can boost their compression by 1/2 point over stock, 80 he runs at 11 to 1.

The Volvo's boxy looks are one of its main disadvantages. "It has no aerodynamics," Gordon said. And at 2,500 pounds, it weighs 400 pounds more than most of its competition. On the other hand, the weight and rigidity of the body gave Volvo its reputation for safety, which in Gordon's accident was a distinct advantage. He was able to repair the rear and front in his own shop — damage he estimates would have cost \$2,000 elsewhere — and went on to win in Seattle.

Despite the weight, the car can do 125 mph and averages 75 on the course at PIR. "We even beat a tube chassis Corvette through the curves," Gordon said of

his car's handling, "but on the straight-aways, their 600 hp runs away from us." Gordon said he has built 2,000 race motors in his career, and now builds race and street motors for Volvos.

Perhaps most ironic about Robert Gordon's victory is how closely he is following in the footsteps of his father, Richard Gordon. He had begun racing Volvos in the 1968 and had to invent and fabricate the speed equipment that allowed him to compete, such as anti-sway bars, headers and cams, which became the basis of his IPD Co., Inc., North America's largest after-market parts distributor for Volvos. Many of these same parts went into making Robert's victory possible. Robert Gordon was six years old when he began watching his dad race and work on cars. "It's in my blood," he said.

Richard Gordon's IPD Co., Inc. has grown into perhaps the most complete and sophisticated supplier of after-market Volvo parts anywhere. The company's free, full-color, 96-page catalog is available upon request to Volvo owners by calling toll-free, 1-800-444-6473. It's replete with accessories to make Volvophiles drool. After all, where else can one find add-on cruise control, headers, arm rests, wide-angle rear-view mirrors not to mention mundane stuff like nuts and bolts and clutch plates all under one mail-order roof?

Richard Gordon's Volvo base has allowed him to expand into such fields as recreational vehicles, for which he has a separate catalog. He has found a niche in suspension enhancement kits for RVs, vans, such as the Toyota Previa, as well as light utility vehicles, such as the popular Ford Explorer, as well as buses, and even rescue vehicles!

Robert Gordon is building his business on the same foundation of racing Volvos. Right now, he is concentrating on the racing. Next year, he hopes to race in Nationals at Atlanta. "I intend to be National champion," he vowed.

GARY EISLER

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*Many thanks, Gary — I always remember and wait for someone to come through — anytime you have anything. Thanks! Jon.*

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